

# Yellowstone

## *The Restoration of Wolves*

Yellowstone National Park  
P.O. Box 168  
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[www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell)



### Introduction

Visionaries began working on wolf restoration in the middle of the 20th century. Their belief, that wolves are essential to a healthy ecosystem, has been proven by scientific research at Yellowstone.

### Brief History

**1926:** After a long campaign to rid the park of predators, the last wolf pack was killed.

**1944 Dec. 1:** Aldo Leopold proposes restoring the wolf to Yellowstone National Park.

**1973 Dec. 28:** The Endangered Species Act is signed into law, laying the foundation for wolf reintroduction.

**1995 Jan. 12:** The first wolves arrive in Yellowstone; **March 21:** The first wolves are released from pens into Yellowstone.

**1998** Yellowstone wolves form a pack in Grand Teton National Park.

**2003 November 5:** Wolf observers report seeing wolves for 1,000 days in a row.

**2004 Feb. 1:** Within one week, wolves #42 and 41—sisters—died. They were the last of the wolves originally restored to Yellowstone.

**2009:** Wolves in Montana & Idaho removed from federal endangered species list; wolves in Wyoming remain on the list.

*January 12, 1995: Scientists brought the first wolves into the park, through Roosevelt Arch (right), beginning the restoration of a predator gone since the 1930s. Local residents lined the road to watch the wolves arrive.*

*Released! A wolf dashes out of the traveling crate into a release pen (below). There, the wolves became acquainted with each other and with Yellowstone. They seldom saw humans, even though scientists watched them from afar and brought them food.*



### How Many Wolves?

As of January 2010, approximately 100 wolves live in Yellowstone National Park, with six breeding pairs.

## About Wolves



**Size** 26–36 inches high at the shoulder, 4–6 feet long from nose to tail tip; males weigh 100–130 pounds, females weigh 80–110 pounds.

**Home range** 100–540 square miles; varies with pack size, food, season.

**Lifespan** Typically live 3–4 years in wild.

**Colors** Gray and black are common in Yellowstone; white or almost white is very rare.

**Breeding** Mate in February; give birth to average of five pups in April after a gestation period of 63 days; young emerge at 10–14 days; pack remains at the den for 3–10 weeks unless disturbed.

**Mortality** Human-caused death is the highest mortality factor for wolves outside Yellowstone National Park; inside the park, the leading natural cause is wolves killing other wolves.

## Food for the Masses

- Wolves eat primarily elk; they also eat bison, mule deer and smaller animals.
- A wolf's stomach can hold about 20 pounds of meat. Therefore, when a pack kills a 500-pound female elk, they can easily fill their stomachs and leave a lot of meat for scavengers.
- Ravens arrive at a kill in less than two minutes; often more than two dozen will wait around until the wolves are done.
- Other scavengers include magpies, eagles (both bald and golden), and coyotes.
- Grizzly bears can take over wolf kills, chasing off the wolves before they finish eating.

## Watching Wolves

*Thousands of people see a wolf in Yellowstone each year.*



When watching wolves, stay safe and know your actions can affect the animals:

- Park in established turnouts and make sure your car is completely off the road.
- Make sure you put your vehicle into park, and engage your parking brake.
- Do not stand in the roadway to view or photograph wildlife.
- You must stay 100 yards from wolves and bears, and 25 yards from any other animals, including birds. If necessary, stay in or return to your car to keep your distance.
- Never surround, crowd, approach, or follow wildlife.
- Don't block an animal's line of travel.
- Do not ever feed wildlife, including birds.

## Wolves and the Future

Some scientists think wolves are central to the proper functioning of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Their return may have triggered changes affecting every part of the ecosystem. Such changes may take decades to see and understand.

In 2005, wolf management transferred to the states of Montana and Idaho. The federal government manages wolves in Wyoming.

In 2009, wolves in Montana & Idaho were removed from federal endangered species list; wolves in Wyoming remain on the list.

## For More Information

[www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell)

The educational bookstores in the park's visitor centers sell many books about wolves, including:

*Decade of the Wolf: Returning the Wild to Yellowstone*, 2005. Doug Smith and Gary Ferguson.

*Once Around the Sun In Yellowstone*, 2005. Doug Dance.

*A Society of Wolves: National Parks and the Battle Over the Wolf*, 1993. Rick McIntyre.

*Yellowstone Wolves: In the Wild*, 2003. James C. Halfpenny